DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 359 871 HE 026 568

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TITLE Monological Innovation versus Polylogical Improvement.
PUB DATE Apr 93
NOTE 31p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Atlanta, GA, April 12-16, 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; *Change Agents; Change Strategies; Colleges; Educational Planning; Higher Education; *Institutional Advancement; Long Range Planning; *Organizational Change; *Organizational Communication; Organizational Objectives; Universities

ABSTRACT

This paper addresses what characteristics of institutional approaches to change succeed in achieving stated institutional aims within a higher education context. It asserts, through an examination of two case studies, that successful organizational change depends on context-laden feedback-driven processes that result in steady incremental improvement. Further, it argues that successful organizational reform depends on polylogical leaders who: (1) develop an understanding of the cultural realities of different internal and external constituents--with themselves included as key constituents; (2) relate to different constituents in terms of their respective cultural realities in order to establish new expectations of the organization; and (3) work with each significant internal and local group to raise expectations, and then to close that group's expectation/experience gaps. The challenge of planning and implementing organizational change, therefore, lies in ensuring that constituents become creatively engaged in the process of bridging the gap between raised expectations and actual experience. (Contains 12 references.) (GLR)

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# MONOLOGICAL INNOVATION VERSUS POLYLOGICAL IMPROVEMENT

Prepared for the Experimental Session:
"Campus Innovation and Change: Structural and Cultural Strategies"

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April 1993

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This paper is based on a site visit to four of 13 institutions included in the Organizational Structures and Policies program of the National Center on Postsecondary Teaching, Learning, and Assessment. The National Center on Postsecondary Teaching, Learning, and Assessment is funded by the U.S. Department of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), Grant R117G10037. The opinions herein do not necessarily reflect the position on policy of OERI, and no official endorsement should be inferred.



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## MONOLOGICAL INNOVATION VERSUS POLYLOGICAL IMPROVEMENT

Sheila Tobias, writing about science education reform, postulates that educational reform efforts that achieve lasting change tend to be characterized by:

- context-sensitive strategies based on feedback-driven processes that are intended to result in steady incremental improvement (1992a, 1992b), and
- local initiative, funding, and accountability.

She contrasts this approach with one that tends to create heat and smoke but no sustained positive change. This approach is characterized by:

- context-insensitive strategies based on universalistic theories believed to have self-evident value that are intended to produce a quick-fix innovation (usually involving a product or program), and
- external initiative, funding, and accountability.

Tobias' hypothesis addresses a question very similar to one asked by the Organizational Structures and Policies program of the National Center for Postsecondary Teaching, Learning, and Assessment (NCTLA). Our research program is shaped by the question, "What organizational structures and policies help colleges and universities to better achieve their goal of meeting the learning needs of students, particularly underrepresented students?" Assuming that efforts to more adequately achieve institutional goals primarily entail change processes, the question can be restated as follows: What are the characteristics of institutional approaches to change that succeed in achieving stated institutional aims?

In this paper I assert that Organizational Structures and Policies research appears to only partially confirm Tobias' postulate that locally-initiated and supported, feedback-driven approaches to change tend to be more successful than externally-initiated and funded, theory-dominated approaches. Our case studies include examples of lasting and significant change which were externally initiated and funded. I propose that our data actually affirm the general idea behind her assertion, but we can enhance our understanding of the character of change by reframing her ideas. In particular, I would place greater emphasis on the skill with which change agents communicate with diverse constituents both within and outside their organization. With this mind, I propose that institutional change processes that succeed tend to:

- address both external and local constituents in polylogical terms, that is, in terms that make sense within each different constituent's cultural realities; and
- raise expectations for institutional performance in increments that enable both external and internal constituents to close the gap between their expectations and experiences.

Conversely, I propose that change efforts that fail to produce lasting change tend to:

- address all constituents in monological terms, that is, in the terms that are taken for granted by the leaders; and
- raise high expectations for institutional performance, while failing to manage the gap between various constituents' expectations and experiences.

Like Tobias, I emphasize that successful organizational change depends on context-laden feedback-driven (gap-closing) processes intended to result in steady incremental improvement. I do not, however, focus on what Tobias refers to as the "burden" of funding provided by outside agencies (1992a, p. 17). I also do not imply that the only successful change efforts are those characterized by local initiative, funding, and accountability. Rather, I highlight the notion that successful change efforts are initiated and implemented by people who respectfully address the expectations of both their various local and external constituents. It proposes that in the same way that leaders must relate successfully to various internal constituents in terms of cultural differences based on ethnicity, gender, class, age, and so forth, they also must relate to external resource-rich agencies in terms of their various cultural differences.

To illustrate my argument, I first describe the change processes at two of the twelve institutions in our research program,[1] Cody State University and Bayfield College (pseudonyms), and indicate how they appear to partially support Tobias' claim. Then, drawing on the examples provided by the two case studies, I explore why my explanation helps us better understand change in institutions of higher education.

## "Improvement" at Cody State University[2]

In 1984, Cody State University was a mid-sized comprehensive university suffering from low morale, internal fragmentation, and a mediocre reputation. More than 50 percent of the school age children in the region were ethnic minorities, but the percent minority students and tenured faculty at Cody State was only 24 and 13 percent, respectively. The state legislature assessed Cody State's performance as a university to be so weak that it

considered revoking its recently-granted university status. At the same time, Adobeton, the Southwestern town of some 100,000 people in which Cody State is located, was suffering from the major downsizing of its primary industry. Unemployment had soared to more than 20 percent.

By 1991, Cody State University had completed and recovered from a major retrenchment process that entailed the reallocation of resources in line with a consensually developed change in institutional mission. As a Cody State report stated, "We more than doubled academic support budgets, enhanced selected programs targeted for accelerated growth, and significantly reduced administrative costs. General administrative functions decreased from 21.8 percent of the non-scholarship portion of the Education and General Budget in 1984-85 to 12.1 percent in 1990-91." During the same six year period, unemployment in the town declined because many high tech companies moved to the area, drawn, in part, by the significantly improved reputation of Cody State. In addition, by 1991, the percentages of ethnic minority students and faculty, having dropped with the elimination of two-year vocational education programs, resumed their 1984 levels. Cody State changed from an institution with a de facto purpose of merely retaining whatever programs it had acquired since its inception as a community college in the 1930s, to an organization with a clearly articulated mission as "one of the best regional universities."

How did Cody State make this striking institutional change? Cody Staters' answers to this question entailed stories of a pre-1984 period during which faculty had developed a "feisty" attitude toward administrators in reaction to a series of autocratic, self-serving, visionless, "failed" presidents. This period culminated in a 1984-85 "crisis" that was

triggered by an event that threatened the institution's identity. The legislature, charging that the institution was too similar to a community college, threatened to revoke its university status. Responding to this threat, the State University Board intervened by hiring a new president and instructing him to "clean house."

Jolted out of their accustomed ways of perceiving their institution (Meyer 1982), diverse constituents found it necessary to cooperate, to address a single set of issues or lose their university status. They were assisted in this process by the president and his staff, who took responsibility for understanding the expectations and problems experienced by a broad range of both external and local constituents and who worked closely with all constituents to formulate and then enact a new vision for the institution. More particularly, they turned the retrenchment crisis created by the legislature and the Board into an opportunity for "external" (indirectly involved) constituents to gratify their desires to support high quality public education, and for "local" (directly involved) constituents to shift from an inherently simplistic and oppositional heroic model of the leadership to an inherently complex and enabling model of leadership. This improvement process entailed three phases: the establishment of enabling external support, a passing phase of "flexible rigidity," and the establishment of a distributed and enabling model of internal leadership.

Three Phases. Essential to the success of the Cody State improvement process was enabling support from external constituents. The external constituents--the State University Board, the legislature, and powerful members of the Adobeton business community--provided the university with a workable political and economic framework. The State Board and legislature provided this framework by first "creating" a crisis, next selecting a new president

with a reputation as a leader, and then providing this president with both a strong mandate to reorganize the institution, and a secure resource base with which to enact this mandate. This resource base was provided in the form of a legislative agreement to maintain the institution's enrollment-driven funding at the pre-retrenchment level for five years so as not to "punish" Cody State for succeeding with its reorganization. At the same time, powerful Adobeton business leaders generously granted money to the institution and worked closely with the administration to attract new businesses to the area. Without these externally provided conditions, it is doubtful that any leaders could have initiated and sustained the kinds of renewal seen at Cody State.

Enabling relationships with external constituents in place, the president temporarily employed a "flexibly rigid" management strategy, an approach characterized by a willingness to compromise on means but not on ends (Birnbaum 1988: 146). Using this strategy, the president played the "strong leader," and fostered the development of a "revolutionary" strategic plan. These external agents, he knew, expected to see a leader at the front who would formulate a "strategic plan" and produce outcomes in the form of conventional performance indicators. Only if they felt confident that the institution had this kind of leadership would they act on behalf of the institution. For example, one business leader explained that he supported the new Cody State because, "The president built good relations with the business community, showcased the faculty, and did lots of image work, constantly sending external constituents a message that they were striving for quality." Another business leader made it clear that a "quality" university was one that did not have "the

welding classes, and the basket-weaving classes," but rather had the characteristics of "an institution that was serious."

At the same time that strategy met external constituents' expectations for "heroic" leadership and outcomes, it also was instrumental in establishing a new internal environment in which internal constituents could set about developing and enacting their own vision of a "new Cody State." As far as internal constituents were concerned, an heroic leader strategy was necessary to get the institution through the difficult times when programs and people were let go in order to enable the reallocation of resources. As one administrator explained,

> The reorganization wouldn't have worked without very strong leadership, because first of all, it's a very painful process--with people losing jobs. It took an inordinate ability to articulate what we were doing, and to continue to articulate what we were doing--over, and over, and over again, and maintain your resolve in the face of all of this. And the major person articulating this was the president. He was the person who had to set the backbone for all the rest of us to act.

Even as they pursued a flexibly rigid management strategy, the president and his staff sought to establish conditions that would enable local constituents to shift to a third stage, in which they acted in accordance with a distributed and enabling model of leadership. The president knew that when an organization's rank and file constituents are given little responsibility for managing the complexities of institutional decision making, they are able to assume only simple and passive positions vis a vis institutional leaders: they can remain indifferent, take a nay-sayer's position, or take an uncritical advocate's position. To foster

an environment in which people could shift from passive reliance on a heroic model of leadership to active involvement in distributed and enabling leadership processes, the administration sought out a group of "effective followers," that is, faculty and staff who were "committed to the institution's purposes, [saw] themselves as the equals of leaders, [had] high performance standards, and [sought out] overlooked problems" (Birnbaum 1992, 120).

Empowered with responsibility and resources, these effective followers realized that they had better understand each other and work together if they were going to successfully implement new ideas. This realization enabled them to come to the table prepared to assess their own myths and assumptions about their institution, and perceive one another as complex--and capable--individuals. Accordingly, they resisted viewing each other simply as members of opposing factions. For example, they found it inadequate to view colleagues who stressed research merely as advocates for research university values, or to classify colleagues who were strongly concerned about social equity as simple advocates of community college values. They found it pointless to view the administration as "them" and faculty as "us." Instead, they sought to understand each other's complex perspectives, and meet one another's complex expectations. This change comprised what Senge refers to as a shift to an attitude of reflective openness (1990, p. 276-280).

As these effective followers assumed decision making responsibility, and became deeply involved in networks of small leader-follower groups, they found that they no longer held simple perceptions of the president and his staff. No longer did they reduce these top administrators to either mere "heros" or "villains." Rather, they perceived them as intelligent and committed colleagues working along with them to make sustained

improvements which, together, would enable them to achieve their overarching institutional goal of becoming "one of the best regional universities."

As already indicated, this story of change at Cody State appears to partially confirm Tobias' postulate that locally-initiated and supported, feedback-driven efforts to achieve steady improvement are successful. The change at Cody State was most certainly feedback-driven, as the President and his staff depended heavily on their capacity to listen to and respond in an enabling manner to various constituents. The change effort also was intended to result in sustained incremental improvement. However, the change was not locally-initiated. On the contrary, it was precipitated by an externally created "jolt," was sustained by externally-provided funds and political support processes, and the institution was held to account by external agencies. Moreover, the change effort was intended to result in sustained incremental improvement, but only after an initial radical transformation was completed.

## "Innovation" at Bayfield College[3]

Like Cody State, Bayfield College is a mid-sized non-elite comprehensive institution. Located in an Eastern state with a college-age population that was 80 percent white (13 percent African American)[4], 94 percent of its students were white and most were local commuters. Unlike Cody State, Bayfield is a private institution with substantial tuition charges, receiving student tuition assistance for some in-state students. Bayfield College was chosen for inclusion in our study because it had received a three-year state grant that reviewers had praised. The grant, which had been funded for almost two years at the time of my site visit, helped finance Bayfield's "Democratic Citizenship Project" (DCP). One of

the fundamental aims of Bayfield's Democratic Citizenship Project proposal was to provide a learning environment to help all students understand that commitment to the common good and appreciation of diversity--on campus and in society at large--are fundamental to the exercise of social responsibility in a democratic society.

Bayfield, similar to Cody State, was founded as a community college in the 1930s, and grew substantially during the 1950s. Due to competition from a new state university established nearby, enrollment declined by one-third during the 1960s to the level that it currently maintains. Hard times ensued and different administrations used largely top-down strategies to manage the situation. During the 1970s, untenured faculty were released, faculty collegiality was close to nonexistent, and faculty-administrator relations were strained. This period culminated with a faculty strike and the appointment of the current president in 1979.

The new president described the college to which he came as "without a sense of purpose, with a faculty and administration at odds." He viewed his appointment as "an opportunity to rethink the institution's mission." During his first year, he involved faculty in the development of Bayfield's first mission statement, which focused on building a more diverse student body and incorporating community values, such as "responsibility for the corporate life of society," into the curriculum. In 1981, a newly appointed provost began "a process of college-wide academic planning" to reform the general education curriculum and formulate campus learning goals. At the same time, the president expedited a campus-wide strategic planning effort which led to a 1983 plan approved by the faculty and board of trustees.

Faculty and administrators described the period between 1983 and 1987 as one of "endless meetings." Throughout this period the administration and faculty union struggled over administrative retrenchment proposals and faculty salary demands and slowly, painfully, came to a consensus on a revised general education curriculum. With the new curriculum plan completed in 1987, yet more meetings, involving groups of faculty, resulted in the establishment of Bayfield's campus-wide Eight Learning Goals. A large portion of the faculty took time to attend faculty development seminars sponsored by the provost. Simultaneously, faculty members planned and implemented curricular reforms such as freshman seminars and course "clusters" (three courses offered by different departments and sharing a theme and taken by the same group of students). All the while, student services staff cooperated with the college deans and provost on the development of new programs, such as training faculty to become paid faculty advisors. The College also prepared for a 1986 accreditation visit from the Some States Association (SSA). Despite all the meetings that resulted in the mission statement, strategic plan, curricular reforms, Eight Learning Goals, and other changes, the SSA reviewers identified Bayfield's key problems as a weak sense of shared mission, strained faculty-administrator relations, and the lack of outcomes assessment.

Then, in 1987, a state "Grant Invitation" to private colleges challenged applicants to develop an institutional identity that would enable them to "move...dramatically toward achievement of excellence and national recognition" (DCP Proposal, p. 1) Partially in response to recommendations made the by the SSA review team and partially out of the momentum for change which had developed on the campus during the decade, a core group

of administrators and faculty rose to the state's challenge. As one administrator explained, all the internal pieces were in place, and they believed that, at the least, the task of formulating a proposal for achieving excellence and national recognition would help them address the internal weaknesses identified by the SSA.

So it was that Bayfield's external grant phase began. For two years a core of some 40 faculty, divided into eight committees and led by the provost and a college dean worked collaboratively on the Democratic Citizenship Project proposal. Building on the foundation laid by the faculty earlier in the decade, they developed a 100-page document that proposed

> a comprehensive educational plan designed to develop leadership and social responsibility for the common good. The plan is conceived to insure at a minimum that all students are exposed to systems thinking, to values that support democratic leadership and action on behalf of the common good, to an understanding of the dynamics of the social realities that will shape the 21st Century (accelerating technology, global interdependencies, cultural diversities and networked organizations) and to cooperative learning and collaborative problem-solving experiences. (DCP Proposal, p. 26).

To accomplish these diverse objectives the proposal described a complex set of scheduled activities, including 31 pertaining to the curriculum and co-curriculum, eight pertaining to faculty development, ten to community-college partnerships, and six activities for the DCP's Institute for the Study of Democratic Leadership. In addition, the proposal included a large number of planned evaluation and dissemination activities.

The DCP proposal writers were rewarded not only with a generous three-year state grant but also with high praise. For example, an external reviewer well-known in the higher education research community characterized the document as "a terrific piece of work...powerful and impressive because it... takes a lot of the things many have been saying are important in undergraduate education today and integrates them." Another well-known higher education scholar also described the document in glowing prose: "Your argument for citizens as leaders is timely and distinctive... [and carves] out a niche for the college in American higher education... I found the concrete examples of praxis the strongest part of the whole document."

Both the written materials provided by administrators and key DCP interviewees demonstrated that the DCP leaders were thoroughly conversant with recent organizational and leadership theory. For example, the provost and the college dean who directed the grant prepared a conference paper that stated:

> [In developing the DCP,] four environmental "realities" were identified that influenced the construction of our educational plan--realities that will have increasing significance in the worlds of work, home and community:
>
> - complex, interdependent ecological, biological, sociopolitical and economic systems;
> - cultural diversities based on race, ethnicity, social class and gender and the inequalities among groups;
> - accelerating, complex technologies;
> - networked, decentralized organizations (Dean & Provost, p. 6).

They used similar abstractions *to* describe implementation of the *DCP*: "At Bayfield we have designed a comprehensive educational plan that is transforming the College and creating an environment to produce socially responsible leaders and participant-followers with a sense of the common good and a willingness to act on its behalf" (p. 7). The driving force behind the DCP vision, they explained, was,

> our "product," the graduating student...the recipient and embodiment of the vision. The transformative power of the vision is that its achievement is dependent on the college environment, its people and its programs. There is an implosion effect of curriculum, co-curriculum, the major, general education, and the culture of the campus (p. 16).

They also elaborated on key theoretical concepts, such as how "the process of interactive learning (in the classroom or work place) has the same benefits as the process of collaborative planning" (p. 19, emphasis in original). Likewise, they presented program implementation as a theoretical problem:

> [Nine months into the grant period] we have completed a process of devolution to assure against centralized calcification of the vision. For continued development and successful implementation, a decentralized, interwoven organization of responsibility was necessary. Thus the fifty people and twelve advisory committees who now have specific program responsibilities have many lateral links to one another and all use the DCP plan and philosophy to guide program development. Fine tuning the balance between decentralization that encourages operational decisions at the local level and the need for

guidance that derives from a more macro-level view remains an interesting, if classic, challenge (p. 21).

Noting that they were facing escalating costs that would "require some downsizing," they concluded by stating: "As long as the processes of planning and implementation remain consistent with the values and philosophy of the DCP--open, collaborative, and committed to empowerment--the vision is not in jeopardy" (p. 25).

As for the reform effort's accomplishments, the grant coordinator reported that he had hired a DCP assessment specialist, and faculty noted that an Office of Cross-Cultural Relations, and Office of Volunteer and Community Service had been established and had begun sponsoring projects. It was from documents provided by the College, not interviews, that I learned about most DCP accomplishments, however. For example, one document listed a variety of faculty seminars and training programs and reported that some two-thirds of the faculty had "spent time developing interactive teaching strategies." Neither interviewees nor documents provided clear accounts of the numbers of students involved in these DCP activities. At most, faculty and administrators made remarks like, "Twelve students were involved in this project," or "We began this program by inviting 25 students to participate." With almost two-thirds of the grant period behind them, no faculty or administrators described or provided copies of preliminary results of the elaborate assessment program described in the grant proposal.

The student interviews also indicated minimal student involvement. Only those who were actively working with the Assistant Dean indicated that they even knew of DCP activities. While clearly positive about their involvement with core DCP faculty, students

were less enthusiastic about most of their classes. The upper-class students were critical of the teaching practices of all but a few faculty members. The predominant opinion expressed by the first year students was that the faculty were "nicer" than students had expected and that classes were easier than expected. Moreover, no interviewees brought my attention to the numbers of minority students attending Bayfield, let alone involved in DCP activities. Reports showed that minority enrollment remained at less than 6 percent--far short of a satisfactory level, given that the enrollment was almost entirely drawn from the state, and the state's college-age population was 20 percent minority. In short, there was little evidence that the DCP "empowerment" processes affected the College's "product."

While outcomes information was limited, opinions about the DCP process were abundant. Some faculty stressed how the grant leaders believed that "the DCP ideas were inherently good and would sell themselves." Several who described themselves as already interested in using less hierarchical teaching methods and multicultural curricula appreciated the opportunities to meet with like-minded colleagues which the DCP planning meetings and seminars provided. At the same time, however, they were not sure if others were much affected. Some were uncertain how "embracing the DCP ideas" had, or would, change everyday faculty practices in and out of class. Others spoke of weak faculty "buy in." Even those who were most optimistic about the DCP noted that there was a general consensus that the faculty as a whole was not "on board." For example, one observed that although the faculty senate had not formally approved the DCP, the College had published new promotional materials describing how the DCP was helping to produce "Bayfield's graduate of the 21st century."

Interviewees provided various main reasons for weak faculty "buy in." Many faculty were fearful of and/or philosophically opposed to the DCP. Others were alienated because they did not see how the DCP, as currently planned and implemented, could alter the monocultural assumptions and authoritarian behaviors of certain administrators or affect the passive and self-absorbed attitudes of many students. Others noted that it was inherently contradictory to have administrators spear-heading a reform process that depended on grass-roots interest. That the feelings of these faculty were shared by the president was made evident when, about a year after my site visit, he did not renew the provost's contract, divested the college dean who had directed the grant of her role as grant director, and required the grant coordinator to take charge of the grant and report directly to the him. The prospect that the DCP would improve the learning environment for a group of ethnic minority students whom Bayfield was barely able to attract and retain, let alone empower, suddenly appeared dim indeed. Clearly, there were problems with the DCP's "terrific" plan for creating a learning climate that supports the educational and developmental needs of diverse students.

In contrast to the example of institutional change at Cody State, Tobias' argument appears to explain the institutional change effort at Bayfield. It makes adequate sense of the promising mid-1980s period of change, which was feedback-driven, locally initiated and funded, and intended to produce steady, incremental improvement. It also makes sense of Bayfield's DCP period, suggesting that the promising mid-1980s activities on which the DCP was built got derailed when leaders were drawn into a change process that was externally-initiated, funded, and reviewed. Nonetheless, I propose that it is not particularly helpful to

attribute the difficulties that beset the DCP to its dependence on external funds. It is more to the point to attribute the problems to the local leaders failure to continue to address their various local constituents once they began to address external constituents.

**Analysis**

I proposed that Tobias' claim about organizational change could be made more powerful--could more adequately make sense of our Organizational Structures and Policies findings--if it placed greater emphasis on the way in which change agents communicate with diverse constituents. By making such a change, Tobias's argument is altered in two basic ways.

First, it is less important than Tobias would suggest whether or not reform has a "local" or "universalistic" focus. Whereas Tobias emphasizes the local character of successful educational reform efforts, my analysis of the Organizational Structures and Policies case studies highlights the polylogical nature of the interactions that the leaders of successful change efforts maintain with both local and external constituents.

Second, I interpret the value of incremental change differently from Tobias. Tobias focuses on the importance of incremental change in successful reform efforts, whereas I emphasize the careful management of the gap between constituents' expectations for change and their everyday experiences. Both Tobias and I assume that incremental change makes it more possible for people involved in organizational change to tolerate the expectation-experience gaps that inevitably are created by reform efforts. But while Tobias's emphasis tells us that incremental change works well, my analysis considers why it works well. When constituents can perceive that their efforts to effect change bring everyday experience in line

with their new expectations, they appropriate the "idea" of change as their own and become committed to it. They also conclude that the extra demands created by the reform process are worth the effort necessary to move on to the next increment of change. By contrast, when constituents experience the gap between their expectations and experiences as too wide, they disengage from or even sabotage the planned change. With these differences between Tobias' and my analyses, I return to the case studies presented above to illustrate why my version helps us better understand change in institutions of higher education.

Cody State University

I concluded the story of change at Cody State by explaining that this case provides an apparent counter example to Tobias' postulate. Far from being locally-initiated and funded, the change at Cody State was precipitated by an externally created "jolt" and sustained by external monies and political support. In addition, its success in establishing an environment that supported sustained incremental improvement depended on an initial period of radical transformation. Now I propose that by using an enhanced version of Tobias' argument we can see that Cody State's reform process is only an apparent counter example to her basic theory.

First, I maintain that what is important to understand about Cody State is less a function of whether the focus of the change process was "local" or "universalistic," and more a function of the way the senior leadership communicated with diverse local and external constituents. The change process was shaped throughout by the polylogical frame of mind that informed the leaders' interactions with others. The president and other members of his staff adjusted their interaction processes to take into account the default assumptions of

different constituents. For example, the president addressed state officials and certain local business people in the voice of the traditional lone-hero. These people expected a leader at the front who would formulate a "strategic plan" and produce outcomes in the form of conventional performance indicators. When the president met these expectations (thus closing their expectations/experience gap), they were able to act within their own spheres of influence on behalf of the institution.

By contrast, the president addressed faculty and staff leaders and certain community leaders in the voice of an enabling leader who stays in the background. The senior leaders gave those campus constituents who wanted to work toward achieving the newly formulated overarching institutional mission responsibility for making consequential decisions and provided the resources to achieve their goals. Whereas this enabling and distributed leadership approach would have left external agents, such as state officials and local business people, feeling nervous indeed about what was happening at Cody State, it met faculty expectations very well. Faculty are, after all, trained to function autonomously within their own spheres of expertise. In the words of one professor, the president "created an environment--by removing obstacles, providing needed resources, establishing purposes--and then got out of the way." Another explained that the chance to participate in institutional decision-making had provided him,

> an opportunity to move away from just tending the store, just doing your job, just kind of overseeing things--what I call control issues--to being able to move into doing support things, like looking around and seeing what people are doing well, and finding--before they ask you for it--finding a way to help them do that even better... In the past, everything seemed to be top-down, and so hard... We've moved toward a model of trying to see what people are doing, and how to support that... And what are we supporting? We're supporting that teaching and learning process that's going on, and we're bringing the

> students into that too, and the faculty, around that whole idea... [It's like] you're freed, you're liberated, you know, to do what you have been trained and educated to do, and are capable of doing.

This last statement by a local player would not have been made had the president interacted with this man in the same manner with which he interacted with business leaders and members of the Board. What is important about Cody State therefore, is not whether or not its change effort focused on the local scene, but that the change leaders knew how to shift into the different cultural landscapes occupied by their constituents--whether local or external. Like multicultural individuals, they knew when and how to use a different language, a different set of cultural assumptions.

Secondly, what happened at Cody State was less a function of whether the change process was incremental or radical, and more a function of how well the senior leaders managed the gap between diverse constituents' expectations and everyday experiences. It is no doubt the case that it is easier to manage the gap between expectations and experiences when employing an incremental change strategy. However, the Cody State example indicates that it is not always possible to use an incremental strategy and simultaneously meet the expectations of critically important constituents. Had the Cody State leaders responded to their 1984 crisis by choosing an incremental approach to change, they very likely would have accomplished nothing--precisely because they would have failed to meet both external and internal constituents' expectations. In that case, everyone believed radical change was necessary to save the institution, and everyone expected that the change would be difficult but eventually worth the pain. When these expectations for radical change had been met--as

they were by the end of Cody State's "revolutionary" period, it was then time to shift to an incremental approach. And this was what the Cody State leaders did.

In sum, what is important about the organizational change process at Cody State is the senior leaders' ability to respond to the expectations of a wide range of constituents. Important is their polylogical ability to work with others both to reshape expectations and generate situations in which both "local" and external people could close the gap between their expectations and their everyday experience. Approaching change polylogically, Cody State's leaders were able to constantly engage in difficult dialogues, respond to the nitty gritty details, and resolve dilemmas, while simultaneously articulating an overarching vision for this particular organization and its surrounding community. As a result of their efforts, they had external constituents who proudly pointed to their role in supporting the transformation of the university, as well as local constituents who were deeply engaged in the process of making improvements of which they were proud.

Bayfield College

I concluded the Bayfield case study by noting that although Tobias' argument makes adequate sense of the institutional change efforts there, we can better understand why the DCP experienced difficulties through my analysis. Rather than focusing on the idea that the DCP's problems can be attributed to dependence on external funds, it is more helpful to consider the dynamics of the DCPs' leaders relationships to both local and external constituents.

I propose that the most important thing to understand about the reform effort at Bayfield pertains to the way the reform leaders communicated with their diverse local and

external constituents. In particular, it is essential to note that the reform leaders started to use the same language that met the expectations of external funding agents when they addressed their various local constituents. The DCP leaders' behavior was, in this respect, informed by a monological frame of mind. In this regard, the DCP leaders acted in much the same fashion as other educational reformers who attempt to implement what is presumed to be a self-evident universalistic theory. Rather than working closely with local constituents to reshape expectations and generate situations in which these new expectations could be realized, the leaders sought to meet the expectations of a national audience of educational researchers and grantors.

Unfortunately, the default frameworks for making sense used by local Bayfield constituents were not the same as those assumed by educational researchers and state officials. The gap between expectations and experience for educational researchers and state officials is closed by the experience of reading theory-driven rhetoric in proposals and papers. For many Bayfield constituents, however, this rhetoric widened rather than closed the gap between their expectations and experiences. It articulated someone else's expectations, and, moreover, did so in language that left them feeling intimidated and nonessential to the process.[5] They needed documents that contained fewer theories about "the infusion of multicultural knowledge and perspectives into curricula," and "democratic and collaborative pedagogical approaches" and more details about actual implementation strategies, such as, how to:

- avoid overworking and tokenizing minority faculty;

- ensure that scholarship and publications critical to developing multicultural curricula were top priority library acquisitions;
- ensure that student and faculty criticisms of the administration received open hearings, thereby embodying institutional appreciation of real (as opposed to sanitized) diversity;
- ensure that faculty and staff would be rewarded for making efforts to understand how students were responding to the DCP's activities; and,
- ensure that department chairs and deans would review information about student responses and made judicious adjustments in institutional policy.

Given that the DCP leaders were deeply sincere and committed to their efforts, how did their project get derailed? I propose that the DCP leaders unwittingly replaced their experience-based representations of reality with the representations created in the texts (grant proposal, reports, conference papers, and even external evaluators' reports) produced for public consumption.[6] After laboriously investing themselves in months of research, committee meetings and the writing of repeated draft documents, abstract rhetoric, such as "non-elitist organizational interaction processes," "the infusion of multicultural knowledge and perspectives into curricula," and "democratic and collaborative pedagogical approaches," came to replace the messy, ad hoc understandings they previously had developed on the basis of everyday experience. Involved in and shaped by texts intended for a national audience, the reality created in the documents began to stand in for the grant writers' polylogical knowledge of the practical realities of their institution.

These abstract representations inadvertently acted to obscure and thus inhibit the reform leaders' capacity to attend to all the details that must be arranged in order to make a change effort work in a particular locality. Thus, for example, faculty proponents of the DCP showed limited awareness of the disparity between the DCP rhetoric and the experiences of their students, the grant's proposed beneficiaries. For example, of the interviewed faculty members only three gave specific details about student responses to the DCP, while the other six said nothing or provided general and vague observations about students in their classes. Similarly, proponents showed little appreciation of the need for the detailed feedback needed to ensure that the Citizenship Project was having the intended effects for Bayfield's "product," its students. Yet, as various observers have noted, it is these invisible-yet-crucial details that often make or break an educational reform effort (Tobias 1992; Treisman 1992; Bruffee 1992).

I conclude by proposing that successful organizational reform depends on polylogical leaders who: (1) develop understanding of the cultural realities of different internal and external constituents--with themselves included as a key constituents; (2) relate with different constituents in terms of their respective cultural realities in order to establish new expectations of the organization, and (3) work with each significant internal and local group to raise expectations, and then to close that group's expectation/experience gaps. The challenge of planning and implementing organizational change lies in ensuring that constituents become creatively engaged in the process of bridging the gap between raised expectations and actual experience. Meeting that challenge requires leaders who use language like a skilled photographer uses a lens. Language, like a lens, must be

continuously refocused in order to get the details on each subject. Metaphorically fixing one's language or lens in one position will ensure that either the closeup is lost in the big picture, or the big picture is blurry.

Notes

1. During 1991-92 the Organizational Structures and Policies research program made site visits to twelve colleges and universities. Each of these twelve were selected for inclusion in the study because it had embarked on an organizational reform intended to, among other aims, better serve the diverse students attending postsecondary institutions in the 1990s. We also sought to include institutions that varied by institutional type. The primary objective of these site visits was to conduct interviews with a various administrators and faculty and a limited number of students. Top-level administrators selected the interviewees and also provided institutional documents such as strategic plans and activity reports. Thus we tended to hear best-case interpretations of the change efforts under consideration. From these data we developed lengthy case study analyses (available from the authors).

2. My site visits to Cody State University and Bayfield College each lasted three days. Interviews lasted an hour, with some stretching to 2 hours. Students generally were interviewed in small groups, and all others one-on-one. Notes were made during all interviews. In addition, I recorded and transcribed the organizational structures interview. The data development process was extended by asking several interviewees at each institution to critique drafts of my case studies analysis of their change effort.

   During my site visit to Cody State I interviewed 31 people, including four full-time institutional administrators, two college deans (each of whom continued to teach), one faculty member who worked half-time as an administrator, ten full-time faculty members--including three department chairs and the President of the Faculty, seven students, three community people active in both business and public service organizations, and three alumni who also spoke as community leaders and observers. The deans and faculty were from all the different colleges, were varied by rank, and included two Chicanos, one Chicana, seven Anglo men, and three Anglo women. Of the students, two were Chicano and one was African American. One full-time administrator was African, and one community leader was Latino.

3. Thirty-six people were interviewed during my site visit to Bayfield College. These included three full time academic administrators, one full time student services administrator, four faculty members working half time on programs supported by the grant, five other faculty members, one recent alumnus, four seniors, and 18 first-year students. The faculty were from all three of Bayfield's schools and were varied by rank. Except for three of the faculty, one of the administrators, and two of the students, all interviewees were male. But for three faculty members (two African American and one naturalized citizen) and two students (one African American student and one foreign), all interviewees were Euro American.

4. These are 1990 data, taken from the Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1991, p. 22, Table 27.

5. Ironically, the change theory they sought to implement focused on the importance of local action but was communicated in such a matter that local constituents often felt intimidated or alienated by it.

6. In making this criticism, however, I also fault the granting agency and reviewers who encouraged the use of overly idealized rhetorical conventions. They bear responsibility for rewarding the Bayfield grant writers for their skill in producing theoretical and lofty language, and for overlooking the paucity of assessment data showing outcomes for students, particularly minority students.

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